MAYURA

Volume 16

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Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh

BIRDWATCHERS' SOCIETY OF ANDHRA PRADESH

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Papers, short-notes, *etc.*, for *Mayura* should be sent to the Honorary Secretary, Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India. Or E-mail: aasheesh@vsnl.in

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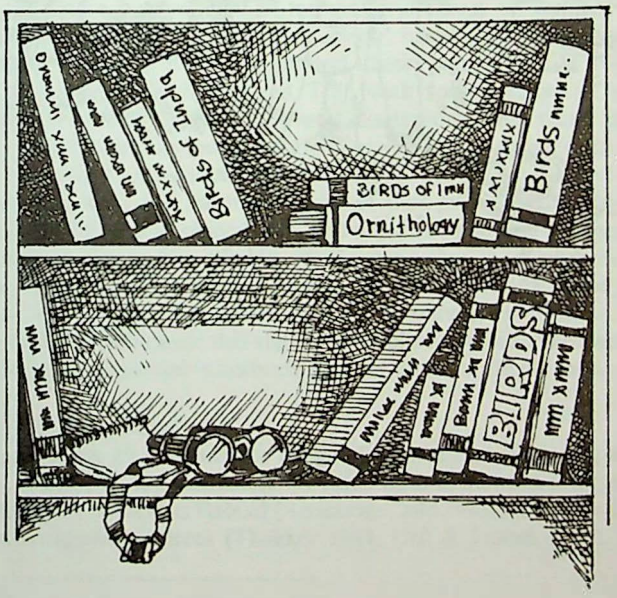
EDITORIAL

AASHEESH PITTIE & SIRAJ A. TAHER

At the outset, we would like to apologise for the delay in the publication of this volume of *Mayura*. The nature of our professional lives permits restricted time that can be devoted to our avocations. Keeping this in mind, the executive committee of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh decided that henceforth, *Mayura* would be an irregular publication. It will not be linked to a year. This means that the papers and short-notes published in it need not be limited to those either received in a particular year, or pertain to studies / observations during that year. We are confident that this arrangement will enable us to publish *Mayura* with greater regularity.

We have included a 'paper' by Krys Kazmierczak, as an example of what details can be incorporated in to a trip report. Besides detailing the habitats and birdlife of Sri Lanka, it gives travel tips for birding tourists.

We take this opportunity to thank our contributors for their patience and our readers for their support.



THE ORNITHOLOGICAL AND CONSERVATION SIGNIFICANCE OF VILLAGE POND HERONRIES. A CASE STUDY OF SEELAJ AND TRAJ VILLAGE PONDS AROUND AHMEDABAD (GUJARAT)[1]

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Village ponds, or *talabs*, as they are commonly known, are a familiar feature of the Indian countryside. Although these are primarily created for water storage, they are also useful in many other ways to the village community. *Talabs* do dry up during the summer but when full, in the post monsoon phase, often attract waterbirds. If the tanks have islands planted with trees then these become suitable nesting grounds for colonial waterbirds such as stork (Ciconiidae), ibis (Threskiornithidae), cormorant (Phalacrocoracidae), heron, egret (Ardeidae), etc.

While conducting an ornithological survey of wetlands in and around Ahmedabad I encountered several interesting village ponds. In this paper I wish to record the natural history significance of two ponds around Ahmedabad, Seelaj and Traj, with special reference to their colonial waterbird diversity. Several discussions have taken place in Sundarvan Nature Discovery Centre (Gujarat) and its parent organization the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), about the steps which can be taken to conserve the biodiversity of such sites (Urfi & Nareshwar 1998). So the second objective of this paper is to outline a conservation action plan for such wetlands, in the hope that it will be useful for conservationists in other parts of the country. An account of the nesting habitat of colonial waterbirds may be of interest to birdwatchers in Andhra Pradesh because this state is particularly well endowed with large populations of colonial waterbirds and has some excellent heronries.

Seelaj Village Pond

Seelaj is about 20 km from the fringe of Ahmedabad. The tank, adjacent to the village is approximately 10 acres in area and has a large island planted with numerous Babool (*Acacia* sp., and *Prosopis* sp.) and Peepul (*Ficus bengalensis*) trees (Thakker 1981, Urfi & Jethwa 1999). During

[1] *Received for publication*: 16 November 1991.

the peak summer months there are hardly any birds at Seelaj, since there is no water. But somewhere around end-June we start seeing Asian Openbill-Storks *Anastomus oscitans* sitting on the tops of trees. With their brilliant white plumage glistening from a distance it seems as if fresh snow has fallen on the treetops. Once while taking an educational tour from the CEE in September 1997 we decided to approach Seelaj from a different direction—from the east instead of the usual western approach, which is accessible from the main road. On this occasion we were amazed to see what looked like a 'wall of nests'. Egrets and herons (Ardeidae), and Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* occupied the middle and lower branches of *Acacia*. The inner branches had nests of cormorants (Phalacrocoracidae). On the top most branches were the nests of Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala*. The Asian Openbill-Storks had virtually disappeared by now save for some young birds that were still on the nests.

Of course, monsoon performance in terms of its timing and intensity is an important ecological factor governing the nesting success of birds in a heronry. Several studies have demonstrated that water-dependent taxa such as Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Painted Stork, egrets and herons breed only during good monsoon years. From such accounts it does appear that there is a strong correlation between monsoon performance and nesting, although the exact mechanisms of the relationship have yet to be worked out. At Seelaj, in 1997 when the monsoon rains were good in Ahmedabad, many species of birds nested here (Table). In this year record numbers of Painted Stork, Asian Openbill-Stork and Oriental White Ibis (*c.*60, 250, 400, respectively) were counted in the heronry.

One of the effects of the monsoon rains, besides triggering off food cycles and dispersing food far and wide due to flooding (Urfi, 1998) is also to create conditions for safety. A number of authors (Gee 1964; also see Subramanya 1996 for a review) have put forth the suggestion that the reason why colonial birds prefer to nest on trees on islands is that they are safe from land predators and human disturbance agents. At Seelaj in a four-year observation period from 1996-1999, heronry-nesting birds bred on only two occasions, i.e., in 1996 and 1997. Painted Storks nested only in 1997, which was an exceptionally good year as far as the monsoon performance goes. However, both 1998 and 1999 were zero years in the sense that no birds nested here. The Asian Openbill-Storks, Oriental White Ibis and some species of herons settled in as usual in June but later abandoned the site. Whether these birds deserted the site to nest at a different location in the neighborhood, could not be ascertained.

Factors besides an inadequate monsoon in these years may have been responsible for the above. Seelaj tank, which normally gets full and

results in the formation of an island even after moderate rains, did not fill up during these two years. Since large tracts of the basin were exposed, it was possible for people from the village to walk up to the island to collect wood and also cut a few trees. The reason why the pond did not fill up is an interesting one. A considerable amount of digging, to scoop up earth for development projects in the neighborhood, is deepening the basin of the tank. Consequently, moderate rains do not fill it up any more. This is an ominous sign for this heronry with a long history. Clearly, human disturbance and habitat modifications are posing a problem to the heronry.

Traj Village Pond

Kheda district, neighbouring Ahmedabad, is considered among the important bird areas of Gujarat, notable for its expanse of inland wetlands (Discussions, Important Bird Areas Workshop for Gujarat, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, Jaipur, 1999). Besides having a high density of Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* (WII, 1999) this area supports several heronries, such as at Traj and Pandoli villages. Traj village pond which was studied in some detail during June-October, 1999, is estimated to be over 10 acres and lies approximately 20 km from National Highway #8, between Ahmedabad and Kheda. Since a canal feeds the pond there is water all the year round. In this regard it is different from Seelaj, which dries up in summer and gets replenished only during monsoon. Traj village pond is divided into two interconnected halves by a low-lying earthen *bund*. One part is shallow and overgrown by Indian Lotus *Nelumbo nucifera* while the other is deeper and has a small island with several *Acacia* and *Ficus* trees on it.

On our first visit to Traj, on 15 June, we observed that about 200 Asian Openbill-Storks had collected on the trees on the island along with Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta* and Little Cormorants *Phalacrocorax niger*. On a second visit on 21 June the nesting of these three species was confirmed and on 14 July, two other species, Oriental White Ibis and Median Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia* were observed to have joined the heronry. Even at this late stage Asian Openbill-Storks were seen flying about, engaged in nest building chores, such as collecting fresh leafy twigs to add to their nests. On the fourth visit on 28 August, chicks of the Asian Openbill-Stork, Oriental White Ibis, Median Egret and Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* were observed. One Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* and four Painted Stork were also observed leading us to hope that these species would nest here at an appropriate time; but were not seen on the next trip on 7 October (Urfi, under prep).

Besides being a heronry, the Traj Pond is an important area from other wildlife aspects too. On most of our visits we encountered

quite high numbers of Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone*, 68 on 14 July being the highest number. These birds were seen mostly in the lotus area and sometimes in the fields just adjacent to Traj. Other types of waterbirds such as jacana (Jacanidae), rails (Rallidae), ducks (Anatidae), kingfisher (Alcedinidae), etc. are also known to inhabit Traj. One of the most interesting features of Traj is the presence of at least 5 Mugger Crocodiles *Crocodylus palustris* in the deep part of the pond (Urfi & Nareshwar, unpublished observations; Vijayakumar & Vyas, 1997). However, in this study we did not come across any instance of Muggers predating on adult or juvenile heronry birds.

Conservation Values

The conservation significance of sites such as Seelaj and Traj is immense because they afford a nesting site for colonial waterbirds. There are also several indirect economic and ecological benefits that such wetlands provide. In the race to conserve large, internationally known wetlands such as the Ramsar sites, these local values are often forgotten. But in those places where due to local action, small-scale water bodies are conserved the benefits are plainly visible. A case in point is the success of rejuvenating small *johars* (wetlands) in the Sariska area of Rajasthan, by activists of a local NGO, the Tarun Bharat Sangh. Much closer home in Andhra Pradesh, is the successful watershed management in Kakanoor village, Mahbubnagar district.

Seelaj appears to be threatened by local developmental pressures while Traj appears safe at the moment. But at the end of the day it is socio-economic forces that are at work. Simple day-to-day considerations lead to trees being cut for firewood or timber needs on one hand and on the other, big decisions resulting in wetlands being drained and reclaimed for development. Birds do not exist in isolation. For feeding or even picking up nesting material they use resources scattered across a very wide area and this sometimes creates problems due to poaching and poisoning for them.

Need for Conservation Education

At the CEE and Sundarvan we have often taken educational tours to Seelaj and Traj. While talking about the heronries and wetlands we are asked numerous questions. Why do the Asian Openbill-Storks and Painted Storks build nests on the top-most branches while the other species do so on the lower or inner branches? Why do we see so many storks spiraling about in the sky, in the company of vultures, early in the day? Hey, what bird is that? Does law protect the birds nesting in the heronry? etc.

Clearly there is a need to not only interpret such sites properly for visiting groups from the city but also to educate local communities so that they can play a role in its protection and interpretation. There is the much greater need to sensitize local people and visitors about wetland values, of which birds are a part. Essentially, there can be two approaches for formulating a conservation strategy for village ponds. One is taking stock of measures to be adopted for conserving village ponds for their larger benefits to the community, and the other being, evolving more bird specific conservation measures. In this paper I wish to elaborate the latter. Interested groups and NGOs can chalk-out some programs along the following lines.

- Training of local youth in bird identification. They could be made to understand the importance of such water bodies and need to conserve these habitats.
- Some simple and interesting literature in the form of checklists, charts, fieldguides, etc. could be distributed for use in schools around the sites.
- Simple sign boards for on-site interpretation can be installed.
- To create interest in birdwatching and increase observation skills in children, eco-club members, school groups and others could be brought to such areas. Nature trails could also be developed for this purpose.
- The local village community could be made more aware about the significance of village ponds and the need to conserve them from the point of view of their numerous benefits, ecological role as wetlands and their bio-diversity.
- Areas such as Seelaj, Traj and many others need to be carefully monitored and studied by naturalists and researchers. A reliable database of bird population trends would be very useful since the birds nesting here are good indicators about the health of their environment.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Shri Kartikeya V. Sarabhai, Director of CEE for his encouragement.

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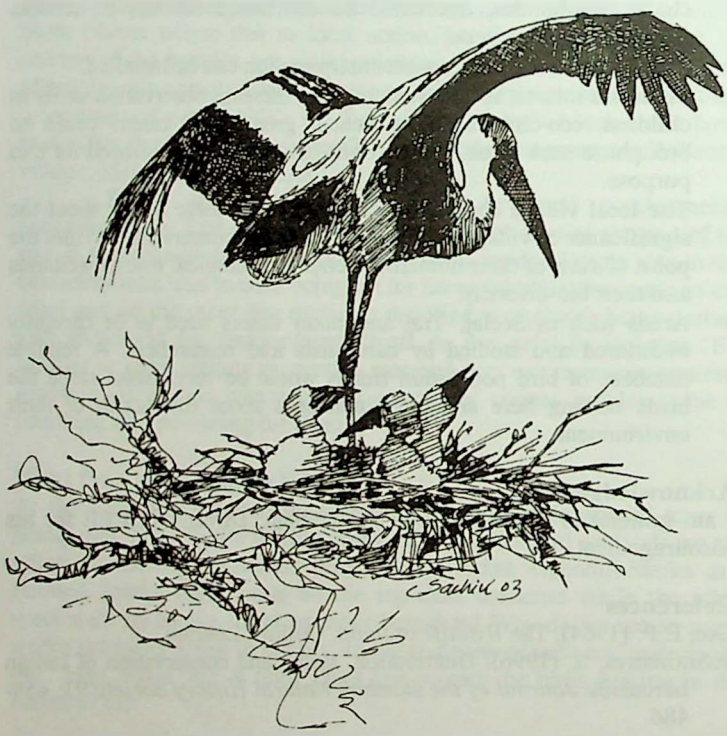

Table

Heronry birds at Seelaj village pond heronry (1996-99)

Species	1996	1997	1998	1999
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*	+	+	—	—
Paddy Bird *Ardeola grayii*	+	+	—	—
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*	+	+	*	—
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*	+	+	—	—
Median Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*	—	+	*	—
Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*	+	+	—	—
Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*	—	+	—	—
Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans*	+	+	*	*
Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* —		+	+	*

+ Nesting.
— No nesting observed.
* Abandoned nesting.

Sachin

BIRDING IN SRI LANKA 25 NOVEMBER—20 DECEMBER 1990[1]

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Introduction

Sri Lanka is a delightful tropical island inhabited by friendly, easy-going people and a selection of birds and animals to satisfy anyone with an interest in natural history. With a list of more than 400 species, Sri Lanka provides an easy introduction to the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent. The road network is fairly good, distances are not too great, and most of the interesting birds, including all of the 21 endemic species, can be seen without having to venture into the areas at present troubled by ethnic strife.

Best time to visit is generally from January to mid-March when the climate is somewhat cooler and drier than at other times of the year. The winter months also see the ranks of local birds augmented by numerous migrants from the North.

Sri Lanka is roughly divided into three climatic zones: the Dry Zone which encompasses most of the north and east of the Island, where most of the annual 50 inches of rain falls during the N.E. monsoon; the Wet Zone with some remnants of tropical rainforest occupies the south-westernmost part of the Island and experiences some 200 inches of rain annually, mainly during the S.W. monsoon; the Hill Zone is the mountainous area in the centre of the country mainly around Kandy and Nuwara Eliya. Like most mountainous areas it can experience rain at any time of year. My visit coincided with the end of the N.E. monsoon, which meant that it rained at some time on most days in the "Dry Zone" (floods made some of the roads around Tissamaharama impassable), whereas I experienced dry weather at Sinharaja Rain Forest! An umbrella can be useful at any time of year.

In total I chalked up nearly 220 species and was lucky enough to see all 21 of the Sri Lankan endemics as well as most of those that Sri Lanka shares with South India alone.

Formalities and Getting There

Several international airlines serve Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital. The cheapest return fare from London appears to be £450 with Aeroflot via Moscow (Nov '90). I combined my trip with South India and the

[1] *Revised mss., received*: 17 November 2003.

Andaman Islands, booking flights with Trailfinders in London who were fairly efficient[1]. No visa is necessary for most foreign nationals to visit Sri Lanka but it is best to double-check before going, as requirements can change. On arrival in Colombo a permit to stay for one month is issued. This can be easily extended for another month in Colombo. Foreigners are generally not allowed into the extreme north and east of the island due to the ongoing violence there. This also means that it is no longer possible to reach Sri Lanka by ferry from India.

The only other important permit you need is for visiting Sinharaja, the most important site in Sri Lanka for its endemics. I got this with only about 1½hours of waiting and paperwork but I was fairly flexible with time and dates. It may be worth writing ahead if you are on a tight schedule as accommodation is limited and may be full. See under site notes.

Getting Around

There is a fairly good network of buses and trains, but car-hire is extremely good value and allows much greater flexibility. It is possible to hire cars with, or without driver. The price works out at about the same once you take into account the very expensive insurance for self-drive vehicles. The advantages of having a driver probably outweigh the disadvantages—being a local he knows the roads and traffic conditions, if not he can ask the way, he can translate for you, look after the car and your gear while you are off birding, etc. I can thoroughly recommend Baur & Co., for car-hire because they have reliable cars (mine did not break down once), and perhaps more important, a couple of drivers who speak good English and are used to driving crazy birders around. Hence they know the routes, the sites and are used to getting up early! I hired a car with driver for 19 days—total cost less than £200 excluding only the driver's gratuity. From abroad or in Colombo contact: Mrs. Herma Welikala, Manager—FIT/GIT, A. Baur & Co. (Travel) Limited, No.5 Upper Chatham Street, P.O. Box 11, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka. If you mention you want to do a birdwatching tour, Mrs. Welikala can also suggest itineraries and arrange hotels. In December 1990 rates for non-air-conditioned cars were Rs.13/mile + Rs.50/day driver's allowance, with a minimum charge of 50 miles/day. At this time there were approximately 78 Sri Lankan Rupees to a £ Sterling. A jeep might be useful if you want to visit Yala National Park, Uda Walawe National

[1] **Editors' note:** Information that is prone to change with the passage of time, e.g., fares, details of logistics and itinerary, are over a decade old and are almost certainly not valid today. They have been retained to allow for the flow of the text, and as an example of the type of details that can be presented in a trip report. However, please see '2003 Postscript' at the end of this paper.

Park and Horton Plains, but these can also be hired locally. Rates for a jeep were Rs.20/mile + Rs.80/day allowance.

Accommodation

Luckily, most of the good birding sites are readily accessible from the places of tourist interest and hence there is a fairly good range of accommodation to suit most people. The so-called Rest Houses are a relic of the colonial period and have, in the main, been converted into hotels. In general they are comfortable, conveniently located, often with a nice garden for armchair birding and sometimes have that touch of old-fashioned style. Rooms at the Rest Houses often cost less than £5/night. Accommodation at Sinharaja has to be booked at the same time as you apply for a permit. See under site details. Most of the National Parks (N.P.) are currently off limits because of the troubles. This is perhaps no great loss, with the exception of Wilpattu N.P., as the restrictions on movement within the N.P.s limit birding anyway. For Yala N.P., there is plenty of accommodation at Tissamaharama. For Uda Walawe you can stay at Embilipitiya.

Literature

G.M. Henry: *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon*. 1971 O.U.P. (1978 K.V.G. de Silva & Sons). Available in the U.K. Essential, although some of the endemics are not well illustrated. Good pictures of most of them can be found on Sri Lankan postage stamps that should be available from your local stamp dealer.

W.W.A. Phillips: *Annotated Checklist of the Birds of Ceylon*. (1978 revised ed., Ceylon Bird Club). Useful information on status and distribution.

Thilo W. Hoffmann: *National Red Data List of Endangered and Rare Birds of Sri Lanka*. (1984, Ceylon Bird Club) Small booklet about Sri Lanka's threatened birds and what to keep a particular eye open for.

Salim Ali, S. Dillon Ripley & John Henry Dick: *A Pictorial Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1983, O.U.P. Available in U.K. Useful supplement and cross-reference for Henry.

Ben King & Martin Woodcock: *A Field Guide to the Birds of S.E. Asia*. 1975 Collins. Available in U.K. In many ways the best field guide but only covers some of the Sri Lankan birds. Not essential.

Douglas R. Ranasinghe & T.S.U. de Zylva: *Sri Lanka Avifaunal List*. (1978. Wildlife and Nature Protection Society in association with the Ceylon Bird Club). A checklist with English, scientific and Sinhala names of all the species and sub-species up to 1978.

D.P. Wijesinghe: *List of Sri Lanka Bird Species.* (1989, Ceylon Bird Club). Most recent list of birds reliably reported from Sri Lanka.

Robert L. Fleming Jr.: *Comments on the Endemic Birds of Sri Lanka.* (1977, Ceylon Bird Club). Interesting short pamphlet on the author's search for endemic species in Jan Feb 1977.

Douglas Ranasinghe: *A Guide to Birdwatching in Sri Lanka.* (1977, 1982). 30-page booklet of useful information which I found on the last day of my trip in the bookshop of the Hotel Meridien in Colombo.

M. Shepherd: *Let us Look at Sri Lanka.* No. 9 in the "Ornitholidays" series. Available in U.K. Useful background reading.

Trip Reports by T. Smith, L. Mulford & J. Williamson; Andy Goodwin; Ian & Belinda Denholm were very helpful. Available from FBRIS, 5 Stanway Close, Blackpole Worcs, WR4 9XL.

John & Judy Banks: *A Selection of the Animals of Sri Lanka.* (1986, Lake House). A good portable guide that covers most of the animals you are likely to see, except for some of the squirrels. Also books on Birds and Butterflies in the same series. Available in bookshops in Colombo.

W.W.A. Phillips: *Manual of the Mammals of Sri Lanka.* (1980, Wildlife & Nature Protection Society. 2nd revised ed.). A more technical work on the mammals of the island—a little too bulky for ease of transportation.

Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit: *Sri Lanka.* Best of the general information travel guides for the individual traveler.

Maps: I used the Nelles map available in London but found it inadequate as a road map. More detailed maps are readily obtainable in Colombo.

Some of the Ceylon Bird Club publications may be available directly from the Club. They also have a monthly newsletter for members. Write to P.O. Box 11, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Itinerary

C—Colombo 25-27/11.
BE—Bellanvilla 26/11 a.m.
V—Victoria Park, Colombo 27/11 p.m.
P—Puttalam 28/11.
T- Tabowa Wewa (Wewa = Tank or Reservoir) 29/11 a.m.
M—Maragas Wewa 29/11 midday.
A—Anuradhapura 29/11 p.m., 30/11 a.m.
MT- Mihintale Tank 30/11 p.m.

MS—Mihintale Sanctuary 30/11 p.m., 1/12 a.m.
HA—Habarana en route to S.
S—Sigiriya 1/12 p.m., 2/12.
D—Dambulla 3/12 a.m.
PE—Peradeniya Botanical Gardens near Kandy 3/12 p.m.
U—Udawattakele Sanctuary, Kandy 4/12 a.m.
W—Water Catchment Area, Kandy 4/12 p.m.
K—Kandy area 3/12-5/12.
PU—Pussallewa en route to N 5/12.
N—Nuwara Eliya (pronounced 'Nureliya') area 5/12-6/12.
H—Hakgala Botanical Gardens near Nuwara Eliya 5/12 p.m., 6/12 p.m.
HW- Hakgala Waterfall, dusk 5/12; dawn 6/12.
G—Galways Land Sanctuary, near Nuwara Eliya 6/12 a.m.
Y—Yala National Park (Rahuna N.P.) 9/12.
KA—Kalamitiya Marshes 10/12 p.m.
HM—Hambantota 10/12.
BO—Belihul Oya 11/12-13/12.
PW—Peak Wilderness above Pinnawala 12/12 p.m.
R—Rasagalla Forest 13/12 a.m.
KI—Kitulgala 13/12—15/12.
GA—Galboda Forest 15/12 p.m.
GI—Gillimale Forest 16/12 a.m.
I—Ratnaloka Tour Inn Area near Ratnapura 16/12 p.m.
F—Sinharaja Forest (Including Kudawa Base Camp area) 17/12-19/12.

A-B—En route from A to B.

Acknowledgements
Grateful thanks to Mr. T.W. Hoffmann, President of the Ceylon Bird Club for all his help and advice. To his secretary Mrs. Y. Nadarajah for obtaining books for me. Mrs. H. Welikala was very friendly and helpful in many ways—I hope we did not frighten her too much. Particular thanks to Donald Samarasingha—driver, guide, interpreter and organizer extraordinaire. Thanks to Jon Hornbuckle for company while birding around Nuwara Eliya.

Contacts
Mr. Hoffmann is pleased to meet any serious birders visiting Sri Lanka and can offer useful advice. He can be contacted at Baur's Building, 5 Upper Chatham Street, Colombo Fort, which is also the address of the Ceylon Bird Club (P.O. Box 11). The Wildlife and Nature Protection Society have their office nearby next to the lighthouse, but I did not find them very helpful although they may have some literature available. The

society runs a number of lodges, etc., in parks and so on but these are usually fully booked well in advance. Address is Chaitiya Road, Colombo.

Systematic List[1]

In the Oriental Region there is much confusion regarding the English names for birds with each country, and often each author, having their own preferences which results in the same species having up to 10 different names, depending on which part of the world you are in. I believe the Oriental Bird Club is in the process of producing a standardized list that will hopefully be followed by future authors. In the meantime the names I have used probably reflect the current quagmire, but are mainly those used by Wijesinghe, Ali & Ripley and, King, et al. I have given a list of the sites where each species was recorded except in those cases where I found the species widespread and common in the appropriate habitat. Endemic species are marked E. Square brackets indicate 'heard only' or probables.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* M, TM, A, B, HM-BO.
Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis* A, MT, TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger.*
Indian Shag *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis.*
Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* T, A, MT, S, TM, B, Y, HM-BO.
Little Egret *Egretta garzetta.*
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea.*
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea.*
Large Egret *Casmerodius albus.*
Median Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia.*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis.*
Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii.*
Little Green Heron *Butorides striatus* KI.
Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* TM.
Malayan Night-Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus* One immature at V.
Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* BE, M, TM, HM-BO.
Chestnut Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus* One at TM.
Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis* One at BE.
Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* A, MT, S-HA, TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Asian Openbill-Stork *Anastomus oscitans* M, MS-S, TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* 1at B, one at Y.
Oriental White Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* TM, B, Y, KA.
Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea Leucorodia* B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica.*

[1] **Editors' note:** Sequence arranged as per Manakadan & Pittie (2002): Standardised common and scientific names of the birds of the Indian Subcontinent. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 42(3)(May-June): 1+i-viii, 1-36.

Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus* *c.*40 at A, several at MT, *c.*15 at TM.
Northern Shoveller *Anas clypeata* Four at B.
Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Garganey *Anas querquedula* TM, B.
Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus* not uncommon with up to three or four individuals at T, also at C-P, MS-S, S, K-N, N-TM, B, BO, R.
Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* fairly common at tanks and coast.
White-bellied Sea-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* Commonly seen around the northern tanks. Also two at edge of Udawattakelle and one at Yala.
Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* Two at MT.
Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* M, A-MY, BO, KI, GI, F.
Western Marsh-Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* One immature at KA.
Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* One male a.m. and one male p.m. at B.
Shikra *Accipiter badius* One BE, two A, two-three MS, one PE.
Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* One between Ella and Wellawaya (7/12).
Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus* sp.) K, H, BO, F.
Changeable Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus cirrhatus* One in fairly open scrub and cultivation near Sigiriya, three, including one immature, at Yala.
[Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* Two, probably this species, above ridge, at PU].
Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* One or two at MS, one at Y.
E: Ceylon Spurfowl *Galloperdix bicalcarata* Two heard calling at Sinharaja (18/12 early morning). One, probably this species, ran across track later in the morning. 19/12—one male seen well in the open and another two briefly glimpsed in same area in forest near paddy field just before Research Station at Sinharaja. Had heard the call elsewhere without recognising it as that of Spurfowl.
E: Ceylon Junglefowl *Gallus lafayetii* Heard and one male seen at T. Heard 6 or 7 at A. One heard MS. Saw one male and one female and heard one at S. One heard at D. Female at B. One male and heard several at Y. Two male at KA. One female and heard several at F.
Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* T, N-TM, B, Y, KA.
Quail (Turnicidae) T, MS.
Common Buttonquail *Turnix suscitator* Three at Y.
White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*.
Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* Two at TM tank.
Purple Moorhen *Porphyrio porphyrio* BE, C-P, T-A, S-K, TM, KA, HM-BO.
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* C-P, M, A, TM, KA.
Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* BE, C-P, T, A, MT, S-HA, S-K, TM, B, Y, KA.
Pacific Golden-Plover *Pluvialis fulva* C-P, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* C-P, KA.
Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* B.
Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* C-P, B, Y.
Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Lesser Sandplover *Charadrius mongolus* C-P, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus* N-TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*.

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa* B, Y, KA.
Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* C-P, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* C-P, A, TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* C-P, A, MT, TM, B, Y, HM-BO.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* C-P, M, B, KA, HM-BO.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* C-P, A, N-TM, B, Y, KA, HM-BO, KI, C.
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* B, Y, KA, HM-BO.
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* C-P, B, Y, B-KA, HM-BO.
Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* B.
Long-toed Stint *Calidris subminuta* B.
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* B, Y, B-KA, HM-BO.
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*.
Great Stone-Plover *Esacus recurvirostris* B, HM-KA.
Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* B.
Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus* C-P, TM, KA.
Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* C-P, A, TM, B, Y.
Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* TM, B, KA.
Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* C, C-P, HM.
Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*.
Blue Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*.
E: Ceylon Wood Pigeon *Columba torringtoni* only sighting was of a single bird in the forest of the water catchment area above Kandy on 4/12.
Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*.
Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* S, N-TM, GI, F.
Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon *Treron bicincta* T, MS, B, Y.
Pompadour Green-Pigeon *Treron pompadora* MS, S, D, B, GI, F.
Green Imperial-Pigeon *Ducula aenea* T, N-TM, KI, GA, F.
E: Ceylon Hanging-Parrot *Loriculus beryllinus* Four at village 3km north of Sigiriya on 2/12. One Kandy area 5/12. Heard, Surrey Tea Estate 7/12. 14 at Rasagalla and two at Kitulgala. Once I'd gotten used to their flight call the Lorikeets proved fairly numerous.
Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* D, PE, U.
Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*.
Blossom-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* BO, F.
E: Layard's Parakeet *Psittacula calthropae* failed to find these at Kandy, or at least to get good views. (Peradeniya seems to have been taken over by Alexandrine Parakeets). Saw two above Belihul Oya on 11/12 and three on 12/12. Proved numerous, once I'd got used to the call at Sinharaja. Probably under-recorded them at Kandy as with previous species.
Pied Crested Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* C-P, MS, S, B, Y.
[Brainfever Bird *Hierococcyx varius* Heard at SU].
Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* F, [A], [S].
Indian Plaintive Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* D, Y.
Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus lugubris* MS, [S].
Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea*.

Small Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus viridirostris* This species endemic to Sri Lanka and South India was seen at P (two), T (one), A (two), MS (three), D (one), B (one).

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii* Species restricted to the Indian Subcontinent. One seen at Yala.

E: Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus* Species now reckoned to be highly endangered and restricted to few remaining areas of rainforest in Sri Lanka as it has not been reliably recorded from South India since 1958. Only seen at Sinharaja where two singles were present on 17/12 in mixed flocks and three in a mixed flock the following day.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*.

E: Ceylon Coucal *Centropus chlororhynchus* One of the rarest, most-threatened Sri Lankan endemics. Best site for these said to be at Kitulgala where I failed to find it during two days of searching. Around 8 a.m. on 18/12 at Sinharaja I heard two calling about One km along main track beyond the research centre in forest near a steep stream with no obvious bamboo. (It is said to exhibit a preference for bamboo). This was shortly followed by fairly good views of one as it hopped up onto a branch inside the forest. Bill definitely pale—appeared slightly greenish to me, but light conditions in forest not too good. Birds seen by Dr. Hoffmann had pale ivory-coloured bills, not greenish (pers. comm.). Another two birds were heard calling in the afternoon below the research centre. Another was heard once at 6.55 a.m. the following morning. Calls noted—a deep "oop" repeated three to 5 times. On two occasions "oop-oop, oop-oop". Generally seemed deeper, more rounded than call of Common Coucal which, of course, is an "oop" but usually in runs of 6 or more, tapering off in volume towards the end.

Nightjar *Caprimulgus* sp. One at TM.

Indian Edible-nest Swiftlet *Collocalia unicolor* V, MS, K-N, H, N-TM, BO, KI, GA, GI, I, F.

Brown-backed Needletail-Swift *Hirundapus giganteus* Several at F.

Asian Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis*.

House Swift *Apus affinis* MS, S-HA.

Crested Tree-Swift *Hemiprocne coronata* T, B, Y, F.

Malabar Trogon *Harpactes fasciatus* Species endemic to India and Sri Lanka. 1 female seen twice in mixed flock in sholas about 9 or 10 km north of Belihul Oya at an altitude of about 3000ft. One male and one female at Kitulgala.

Small Blue Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* K, S-HA, PE, U, K, B, Y, KA, HM-BO, KI, I.

Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis* A, MS-S, KI.

White-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*.

Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* C-P, T, N-TM, TM, B, KA, HM-BO.

Small Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus*.

Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti* U, F.

Indian Roller *Coracias bengalensis*.

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Several at Yala.

Malabar Grey Hornbill *Ocyceros griseus* Endemic shared with South India. Fairly common A, MS, S, R, KI, GA, I-F, [F].

Malabar Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus* Confined to Sri Lanka and peninsular India. Three seen in tall trees by side of road south of Habarna on way to Sigiriya. Apparently a regular site for them (Donald Samarasingha, pers. comm.). Five at Yala.

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*.

E: Yellow-fronted Barbet *Megalaima flavifrons* Seen around Kandy, three at Belihul Oya. Two at Kitulgala. Numerous Sinharaja.

Crimson-throated Barbet *Megalaima rubricapilla* The distinctive nominate sub-species of a species shared only with the Western Ghats of South India. Was recorded at MS (two), PE (four), U (eight), BO (three).

Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala* A, MS, BO.

Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos nanus* T, MS.

Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Dendrocopos mahrattensis* Y, B.

Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker *Picus chlorolophus* One at F.

Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker *Dinopium benghalense* Sub-species *Dinopium benghalense jaffnense* at A. Red-backed sub-species *Dinopium benghalense psarodes* at BE, MS, S, K, KI.

Greater Golden-backed Woodpecker *Chrysocolaptes lucidus* BO, KI.

Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* One at entrance to U.

Jerdon's Bush-Lark *Mirafra affinis*.

Ashy-crowned Finch-Lark *Eremopterix grisea* B, HM-BO.

Eastern Skylark *Alauda gulgula* B.

Common Swallow *Hirundo rustica*.

House Swallow *Hirundo tahitica* H, BO.

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica* MS, S, KI, I.

Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* PE, U, N, KA, Y.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* B, KA.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* N, H, HW, BO, KI, GI.

Richard's Pipit *Anthus richardi*.

Large Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina macei* Two at A, one at BO.

Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina melanoptera* C-P, S, PU, B, BO, F.

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus* T, A, MS, S, S-HA, K, PE, Y, B, KA, BO.

Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus* K, PE, W, G, H, BO, R, KI, F.

Pied Flycatcher-Shrike *Hemipus picatus* One at Y, one at F.

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* MS, S, Y.

Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus* W, R, KI, GA, GI, F.

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*.

E: Yellow-cared Bulbul *Pycnonotus penicillatus* Numerous around Nuwara Eliya. One above Belihul Oya.

White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus* Species restricted to peninsular India and Sri Lanka. Small numbers at T, A, MS, S, D, B, GI, F.

Yellow-browed Bulbul *Iole indica* Species restricted to peninsular India and Sri Lanka. This species is more a bird of the forests in the Hill and S.W. Wet Zones, whereas previous species occurs more in areas of scrub. U, W, R, KI, GA, F.

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* W, BO, KI, GI, F.
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* T, A, MS, S, S-HA, K, PE, B, Y, BO, R, I, F.
Jerdon's Leafbird *Chloropsis cochinchinensis* A, MS, S, K, PE, Y, BO.
Gold-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons* of several leafbirds seen at Kitulgala only one positively identified as this species.
Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus*.
E: Ceylon Whistling-Thrush *Myiophonus blighi* One heard at HW towards dusk on 5/12. One, seen there the following dawn. One heard at Stream at edge of Peak Wilderness above Pinnawala (Balangoda) Tea Estates on 12/12.
Pied Thrush *Zoothera wardii* Endemic to India and Sri Lanka. One male at H. Two males and two females at SU.
E: Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera* One at KI, [Two heard at F.].
Eurasian Blackbird *Turdus merula* H, HW.
Indian Blue Robin *Luscinia brunnea* 1at HW.
Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*.
White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus* S, W.
Black Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata* C-P, T, A, MS, S, B, KA, BO.
Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* N.
E: Ashy-headed Laughingthrush *Garrulax cinereifrons* Several in mixed flocks at F.
E: Brown-capped Babbler *Pellorneum fuscocapillum* Skulker. Four at W, one at KI.
Indian Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus horsfieldii* W, SU, BO, R, F.
Rufous-bellied Babbler *Dumetia hyperythra* Endemic to Indian Subcontinent. Usually encountered in flocks at MS-S, S, D, K, BO.
Black-headed Babbler *Rhopocichla atriceps* Confined to Southwest India and Sri Lanka. D, W, G, H, B, BO, PW, R, KI, F.
Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* Y, BO.
E: Ceylon Rufous Babbler *Turdoides rufescens* Y, BO.
White-headed Babbler *Turdoides affinis*.
Streaked Fantail Warbler *Cisticola juncidis* BE, C-P, T, S-HA, B.
Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii* S.
Jungle Prinia *Prinia sylvatica* A, MS, W, Y.
Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* C-P, A, MS, S, H, BO.
Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* BE, C-P, T-A, MS, S, TM, B, Y, BO.
E: Ceylon Bush-Warbler *Bradypterus palliseri* One at G.
Blyth's Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* MS, TM, R, F.
[Indian Great Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* KA heard].
Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius*.
Greenish Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*[1].
Large-billed Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* MS, PW, GI.
Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* T, A, M, S, K, Y, R.
Kashmir Flycatcher *Ficedula subrubra* Two at Hakgala, one or two at Victoria Park, Nuwara Eliya.

[1] Now treated as a full species *P. nitidus*.

E: Dusky-blue Flycatcher *Eumyias sordida* Singles at H, SU, BO, R, two at PW.

Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae* S, W, G, SU, BO, KI, GA, GI, F.

Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis* W, H, G, BO, PW.

Asian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, T, MS, S, PE, B, Y, R, GA, GI, I, F.

Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher *Hypothymis azurea* W, PW, KI, GA, GI, F.

White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola* S, D, Y, BO, KI, GI, I.

Great Tit *Parus major* MS, PE, W, N, H, N-TM, BO, KI, Y.

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis* PE, G, H, BO, PW, R, I.

Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* S-HA, B.

E: Legge's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum vincens* One at Kitulgala Rest House, Fairly common at Sinharaja.

Tickell's Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos* BE, PE, K-N, N, BO, R, KI, GI, I, F, Y.

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*.

Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* C-P, T-A, A, S.

Loten's Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia*.

E: Ceylon White-eye *Zosterops ceylonensis* N, H, G, BO, PW, F.

Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa* A, MS, S, D, PE, BO, R, I.

White-throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica* A, B

White-rumped Munia *Lonchura striata* T, MS, K, BO, Y

Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* Species restricted to South India and Sri Lanka. Several at Hakgala. Four above Belihul Oya.

Spotted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* T, A, MS, S, K, N, TM, B, KA, HM-BO, I, F.

Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca* BE, B, KA.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*.

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* N-TM, KA.

E: Ceylon Starling *Sturnus albofrontatus* Several birds in a mixed flock at Sinharaja.

Brahminy Starling *Sturnus pagodarum* P, B, Y, KA.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*.

Common Hill-Myna *Gracula religiosa* U, W, K, R, KI.

Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus*.

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* M, MS-S.

White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens* D, PE, U, K-N, N-TM, BO, R, KI, GA, GI, I, F.

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus* BO, KI, G, GI, F.

Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* C-P, A, A-MS, D, U.

E: Ceylon Blue Magpie *Urocissa ornata* Sinharaja—two on 18/12 and 8 on 19/12.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*.

Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*.

Mammals

Toque Macaque *Macaca sinica* Good numbers seen at MS, A, B and K. Several around N. One troop of 13 at BO.

Common Langur *Presbytis entellus* Quite numerous at A, MS, B, Y. Several at T, TM, H-BO.

Purple-faced Langur *Presbytis senex* Singles at MS and T, two at PW, three at F. Particularly tame at H where up to 10 of the Highland Race known as Bear Monkey seen.

Common Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* One at dusk on approach road to Yala.

Ruddy Mongoose *Herpestes smithi* Two at Yala. One at Belihul Oya.

Striped-necked Mongoose *Herpestes vitticollis* 1at close range at Sinharaja.

[Brown Mongoose *Herpestes fuscus* One probably this sp. At Sigiriya]

Mongoose sp. Two at Bundala.

Jackal *Canis aureus* One then another two at Yala.

Black-naped Hare *Lepus nigricollis* 6 singles at Yala.

Elephant *Elephas maximus* One only at Yala.

Chital (Spotted Deer) *Axis axis* Numerous at Yala. One at Anuradhapura.

Sambar *Cervus unicolor* at Yala.

Flying Fox *Pteropus giganteus* Quite common around the Island, often seen flying out to feed at dusk. Large colonies at PE, U, TM, V.

Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennanti* Ubiquitous.

Indian Giant Squirrel *Ratufa indica* Seen in ones and twos at A, MS, H, N, Y, BO, KI, GI.

Other

Leeches U, W, F, KI.

Crocodile sp. Y, B

Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* Singles at C, K, BO. Two at KI.

Land Monitor Several at B and Y.

Giant Wood Spider 3m and 1f at F.

Snakes Only few seen—none specifically identified.

SITES

Sinharaja Forest

Sinharaja Forest is the most important area of primary rainforest remaining in Sri Lanka and now, thankfully, enjoys total protection. The selective logging that was carried out until recently has ceased. This site is an absolute must for seeing local endemics. 18 of them have been recorded here and during a 3-day visit I saw 14 and heard one other. You need to obtain a permit from the Forest Department (Extension Service). This has moved to a new building shared with the wildlife Department at Rajamalwatta Road, Battaramulla, which is on the edge of Colombo. Tel: 566626. Basic accommodation is available at Kudawa Base Camp but you must book this at the same time as you apply for a permit. Permits can apparently be posted to an address in Sri Lanka (e.g. Hotel) for you. Best to book in advance as accommodation can be full with school parties etc. Rooms have beds with mattresses but no bedding, shared shower/toilet and sometimes electricity. You have to take your own food,

but there is someone there who can cook it for you—no fridge. There are a couple of small shops nearby but these cannot be relied upon for anything essential. The alternative would be to stay at Ratnapura, which would mean very early starts (3.30-4.00 a.m.) to get to Sinharaja for the best birding time. There is a good tarmac road as far as Weddagalla (Veddagala), then 5.6 km of rough dirt road not really suitable for anything other than trucks, jeeps or mini buses (with good clearance). If walking, there is a short cut—ask locals. The best area for birds, begins about one hour's walk uphill from Kudawa. A jeep would be useful in this respect. Like in any Asian rainforest in winter a lot of the best birds are in mixed flocks, so it is a good idea to stick with one as long as possible if you find one. Ceylon Coucal, one of the rarest and shyest endemics of Sri Lanka, has been seen by others in bamboo one or two kilometers along the river from Kudawain the opposite direction to Weddagala. It is worth looking in at the research centre. There is a chap there, named Martin, who has an excellent knowledge of the forest's natural history. I did not spend a long time with him, but he whistled up one of the Ceylon Junglefowl that he feeds and pointed out the song of the Spot-winged Thrush. Charges are Rs.30 entrance fee to the forest and Rs.50 per person per night for the accommodation at Kudawa. This is normally paid at Kudawa and not when you book. Other best birds: Ceylon Spurfowl—two heard early morning on short-cut up to main track, one male seen well on track near paddies and two seen briefly later on in same area in forest; Layard's Parakeet—quite numerous but helps if you can recognize the flight call; ditto for Ceylon Hanging-Parrot; Red-faced Malkoha—up to three in mixed flocks; Brown-backed Needletail-Swift—several fairly high up; Yellow-fronted Barbet—particularly common and approachable; Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker—one or two in flock; Ashy-headed Laughingthrush—three in same flock as Ceylon Starling, several on other side of Research Centre; Indian Scimitar Babbler—more often heard than seen; Black-headed Babbler—quite common; Ceylon Rufous Babbler—noisy birds that draw attention to the mixed feeding parties; Legge's Flowerpecker—seemed as common as Tickell's with good views of up to four a day; Ceylon White-eye—four or five; Ceylon Starling—several in mixed feeding flock near paddy; Common Hill-Myna daily in small numbers; Ceylon Blue Magpie—maximum eight seen on one day.

Bellanvilla

Marshy area just south of Colombo. Possibly same as/contiguous with Additiya Marsh. I took an autorickshaw to Bellanvilla Temple (fairly well known). Marsh starts just behind this though I am not sure how far it extends. Egrets, herons, Yellow Bittern, 1 Black Bittern, Lesser

Whistling-Duck, Shikra, Purple Moorhen, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (Red-backed race), Black-headed Munia. Also supposed to be good for Watercock and raptors.

Victoria Park

If you have a couple of hours to spare in Colombo it might be worth popping in here for some of the commoner species and maybe the odd surprise. I saw an immature Malayan Night-Heron that was hanging around the nursery area. There is also a large colony of Flying Foxes and the gardeners will show you around the botanical aspect—for a small consideration.

Colombo

Seawatching is supposed to be good near the lighthouse in Colombo Fort particularly during the S.W. monsoon.

Kitulgala

This is supposed to be the best place to see Ceylon Coucal. I wasted a lot of time without any luck in this respect. The birding area is across the river from the rest house (rooms Rs.300). The ferry is a dugout, which is supposed to run from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. but this depends on the ferryman waking up. If you go through the village on the main track, this follows the valley of a tributary of the main river. You soon come to a turn off on the left along a logging trail through some good forest that holds a lot of the rarer endemics, particularly if you can find a good mixed flock. I did not. But I did get excellent views of Spot-winged Thrush, Brown-capped Babbler, Malabar Trogon, Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (Crimson-backed race), Ceylon Hanging-Parrot and some others. The area for the Ceylon Coucal is supposed to be down near the banks of the tributary just after you have gone through the village and the other side of the tributary there. The only coucals I saw there were a pair of Greater, which showed well for a while in the riverside vegetation. Also along here were Little Green Heron, Stork-billed Kingfisher, Gold-fronted Leafbird, and Water Monitor. The trees in the Rest House garden appear to be a good place to see Legge's Flowerpecker. The birds are not particularly shy but usually difficult to see at the tops of tall trees. I had one male posing at close range in one of the Ceylon Cherry trees in the garden. Ceylon Rufous Babblers, Red-faced Malkoha and Ashy-headed Laughingthrush are said to be regular in the forest.

Rasagalla

A piece of good forest on the B road from Ratnapura to Balangoda. From Ratnapura drive through Wewelwatta, then Alupola Tea Estate followed

by Agarsland Tea Estate. There is a fairly obvious patch of forest around the 8km. marker (from Wewelwatta). Just after 8km. there is a bigger iron bridge with a path leading up into the forest. Did not have very long here but did see a noisy flock of Ceylon Rufous Babblers, 14 Ceylon Hanging-Parrots, two Indian Scimitar Babblers, several Black-crested Bulbuls, a Dusky-blue Flycatcher and some Common Hill-Mynas.

Gillimale

Another good patch of forest somewhere north of Ratnapura. I took a taxi to get here. Some good birds, although nothing I did not see elsewhere. A bad attack of Delhi Belly made birding uncomfortable.

Galboda

Another piece of remnant forest. You have to go 12 or 13km. from Ratnapura in the direction of Wewelwatta and Gallelle then you come to the tea factory of the Galboda Estate. You turn up through the tea estate and follow the road through this until you come to a patch of forest on the second ridge you climb.

Peradeniya Botanical Gardens

Well-known site near Kandy. Reckoned to be a good place for Layard's Parakeet although I did not see any on an afternoon visit. The gardens seem to have been taken over by Alexandrine Parakeets. Slightly disappointing on the whole but did see four Crimson-throated Barbets, one Shikra, one Yellow-fronted Barbet, several White-bellied Drongos, one white-phase Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, two Velvet-fronted Nuthatches and two Forest Wagtails.

Udawattakelle Sanctuary

Another well-known site on the edge of Kandy. Birds seemed surprisingly few and difficult to see the morning I was here, but there have been many interesting species recorded. There is a small entrance fee for the sanctuary. I saw one Indian Pitta just before the main entrance at dawn, six Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters, several Crimson-throated Barbets, six (+) Common Hill-Mynas, three Yellow-browed Bulbuls, two Forest Wagtails.

Water Catchment Area, Kandy

You need a permit from the Deputy Commissioner at the Municipal Office in Kandy to visit this area of good forest. The permit is checked by the watchman at the barrier if he is there. Otherwise you need to be good in persuasion. This area seemed to hold more birds than Udawattakelle and I would have liked more time to explore it than the

one afternoon visit I had. Best birds: One Ceylon Wood Pigeon, one Ceylon Hanging-Parrot, eight Common Hill-Mynas, two Black-crested Bulbuls, five Yellow-browed Bulbuls, two Black Bulbuls, four Brown-capped Babblers, two Indian Scimitar Babblers, two Black-headed Babblers, one Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, one Large-billed Warbler, one White-rumped Shama.

Hakgala Botanical Gardens

Easily reached from Nuwara Eliya. Explore the gardens and the forest above, into which there are a few steep trails. Best birds here were one Pied Thrush, numerous Yellow-eared Bulbuls, two Kashmir Flycatchers, one Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Ceylon White-eyes in good numbers and three or four Black-throated Munias carrying nesting material. Spotted Munias appear to have increased their altitudinal range as Henry (1971) only gives them as occupying altitudes of up to 5,000 feet, whereas I saw several in the Nuwara Eliya area which has an altitude of over 6,000 feet. Also saw one or two apparently nest building in similar habitat to the Black-throated Munias. The expansion of the Spotted Munia may pose a threat to the Black-throated Munia. Also up to 10 Bear Monkeys (Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys) seen here (very tame).

Hakgala Waterfall

This is the best site to see the very rare Ceylon Whistling-Thrush. Take the road from Nuwara Eliya towards Hakgala B.G. There is a fairly obvious lay-by on the left soon after the 81st kilometer stone. A short track leads down from the lay-by to the top of the waterfall. Best to be here by first light which was when I saw it (with Jon Hornbuckle). We'd only heard it the evening before without getting a sighting, possibly partly due to human disturbance—people coming down to wash. Indian Blue Robin and Eurasian Blackbird also here further down the path.

Galway's Land Sanctuary

This is a very degraded forest reserve that obviously has no practical protection from people cutting wood. It is quite difficult to find but is on a small hill behind the bus station. Probably best to try and get some good directions before you set off, although most locals do not seem to have heard of it. We went up a road past the bus station on the northern side of the lake and then past the army camp on a bad road. After that the first left took us past some houses and on a sandy road to the sanctuary. The road carries on and somehow brings you back to the bus station. We only stayed long enough to find one Ceylon Bush-Warbler, as this is still reckoned to be the best site for them.

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If you have time in Nuwara Eliya it can be worth exploring the race track and Victoria Park.

Surrey Tea Estate

Good small shola around Estate Manager's bungalow can turn up many interesting birds. The Estate is 17 miles from Nuwara Eliya on the road to Badulla, just before Welimada Town. It is not sign-posted but there is a track on the right next to a solid square cement building on the right hand side of the main road. Go up the track taking the right hand fork and at the top of the hill you will see a good shola below to the left. Ask at the house for permission to have a look round.

It was raining while I was here but I did see two male and two female Pied Thrushes, a Dusky-blue Flycatcher, two Scimitar Babblers and some Lorikeets.

Tissamaharama

This is the place that most people stay at in order to visit Yala National Park but the tank and surrounding area are worth exploring too and it is also a good base for visiting Bundala Sanctuary. There are quite a lot of water birds on and around the tank with a particularly good marshy area at the northern end. I saw Spot-billed Pelican, Darter, Purple Heron, egrets, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Chestnut Bittern, Yellow Bittern, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill-Stork, Oriental White Ibis, Cotton Teal, Watercock, Gull-billed Tern, Caspian Tern.

Yala (Rahuna) National Park

You need to hire a jeep or minibus to visit the park. It is usually easy enough to find someone to share the cost. Jeep owners will come to you at the Rest House or hotels. Jeep "safaris" are usually "half-day" which in practice means only about three hours in the actual park. I found it worthwhile taking the jeep for a full day. You have to buy a permit at the entrance to the park where you are also given a Ranger/Tracker—it's worth asking for someone who knows about the birds. Make sure he knows it is for the whole day so he can take some food and drink along (which of course you should do too). You are not allowed out of the jeep except at the forest bungalows. We stopped at one of these by the river for a mid-day rest—good area for birds. It is possible to stay at one of these, but you have to book in advance and bring transport for the duration (and food). A new rule is that you now have to keep the roof on the jeep, making birding more difficult. Still the day I spent here produced a long list of birds and mammals and was certainly worth it.

Bundala Sanctuary

At Tissamaharama they will probably try to persuade you that you need a jeep for Bundala, although this is not really necessary. There is a perfectly good road running east-west through the sanctuary and the rest can be explored on foot. While I was here a group got stuck in the mud by a lakeside for three hours in their jeep, which shows what a lot of use that was. It is a particularly good area for waders with most of the Sri Lankan list having been seen here. Best birds for me were: Painted Stork, Asian Openbill-Stork, Black-necked Stork, Oriental White Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill, Pallid Harrier, Ceylon Junglefowl, Great Stone-Plover, Small Pratincole, Orange-breasted Green-Pigeon, Pied Crested Cuckoo, Small Green-billed Malkoha, Black-headed Munia, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker.

Kalamitiya

Large marshy area with brackish lakes and huge reed-bed south of the main Hambantota-Tangalle road. A side road leads off around km 219/219 to the fishing village of Kalamitiya. At dusk there is a large roost of Oriental White Ibis and Asian Openbill-Stork. Other good birds Spot-billed Pelican, Painted Stork, Marsh Harrier, Ceylon Junglefowl, Baya Weaver. Sand Martin and Eurasian Golden Oriole have also been recorded here.

Peak Wilderness above Pinnawala

Went up here one afternoon in an effort to get into the Peak Wilderness without realizing how far it was and ended up with little time to explore. To get there you take a left turn just after the 147km marker on the road from Balangoda to Belihul Oya, which is sign-posted to various tea estates. The road is actually a through road across the mountains to Hatton and winds up for perhaps 30 or 40km through endless tea estates before coming to some fairly bird-less pine and eucalyptus plantations. Just after this there is some fairly reasonable looking forest at the top of the ridge. Looked as though it might repay exploration if you have time. The road was marked on my map but not shown as going through to Hatton. Traffic very quiet beyond the tea. Altitude 1,200m+. Ceylon Hill-Myna, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher, Large-billed Warbler and Ceylon Whistling-Thrush (heard).

Belihul Oya

There is a pleasant peaceful Rest House here. Just past the rest house there is a side road that is motorable for 5½km up towards the Peak Wilderness area. Not too much of interest along here so it might be worth getting a ride up to this point. From there a dirt road leads up to a temple

with some hospitable monks who offered me tea and invited me to stay the night.

The latter invitation I politely declined, regrettably, since I'd made other arrangements. From there I was told a good track continues for at least another 12km up into the mountains. I went perhaps another five or so and found a couple of good sholas with a large feeding party that included one or two Malabar Trogons, Indian Scimitar Babbler, Ceylon White-eye, White-bellied Drongo. A fruiting fig tree lower down attracted a lot of birds including all four species of barbets. Other good birds on this trail were: Crested Serpent Eagle, a large eagle species, Layard's Parakeet, Blossom-headed Parakeet, Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (Crimson-backed race), Pacific Swallow, Ceylon Hill Myna, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Black Bulbul, White-throated Babbler, Black-fronted Babbler, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Yellow-eyed Babbler.

Tabowa Wewa (tank)

Obvious large lake on the northern side of the road *c.*10km after Puttalam on the way to Anuradhapura. Good for waterbirds and other common species. Also Ceylon Junglefowl, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, Small Green-billed Malkoha, Crested Tree-Swift, Pygmy Woodpecker, White-browed Bulbul, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey, Peafowl.

Anuradhapura

Ancient capital of Sri Lanka with interesting ruins. Nice Rest House. The tanks and Anuradhapura (Forest) Sanctuary worth having a look at for birds. White-bellied Sea Eagle, Painted Stork, Cotton Teal, Coppersmith, Darter, Shikra, Ceylon Junglefowl, Small Green-billed Malkoha, Stork-billed Kingfisher + Grey Hornbill + Giant Squirrel in Rest House garden.

Mihintale Sanctuary

The area around and behind Mihintale Temple. Kestrel, Shikra, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Pied Crested Cuckoo, Small Green-billed Malkoha, Grey Hornbill, Red-backed Woodpecker, Pygmy Woodpecker, White-phase Paradise Flycatcher, Jungle Prinia, Pompadour Pigeon, Drongo Cuckoo, Crimson-throated Barbet, Coppersmith, Quail sp.

Mihintale Tank

A large tank with many dead trees reaching up out of it a few Km past Mihintale on the road towards Trincomalee. Excellent area for raptors with two Grey-headed Fish Eagle, two white-bellied Sea Eagle, 8+ Brahminy Kite, one Crested Serpent Eagle and smaller unidentified raptors. Also 30 Spot-billed Pelican and numerous other waterbirds.

Sigiriya

The rock at Sigiriya is one of the sights of Sri Lanka. Unfortunately, it absolutely poured with rain for the greater part of the time I was here but I managed to do some birding with the aid of an umbrella. Some good jungle around the rock holds a lot of the Low-Country Dry Zone birds as well as elephant and leopard. Shaheen Falcon nests on the rock though I did not see it Changeable Hawk-Eagle, Ceylon Junglefowl, Pompadour Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Pied Crested Cuckoo, Grey Hornbill, Red-backed Woodpecker, White-throated Babbler, Ceylon Hanging-Parrot.

Other Sites Not Visited

Polonnaruwa: Ruins of another ancient capital. Similar birds to Sigiriya.

Rittigala Strict Nature Reserve is en route from Anuradhapura to Sigiriya. Apparently entrance is not controlled here and the site might be worth visiting if you have time.

Knuckles Range: is a fairly unspoiled area under the supervision of the Forestry Department. It is being given some protection, but at present there are no facilities for visitors. It should be possible to explore this in a day-trip from Kandy. Ask at Forestry Department for more info.

Pidurutalagala (Mt. Pedro): Sri Lanka's highest mountain. I climbed this about 10 years ago but found it to be off limits at the moment. Check at Nuwara Eliya.

Horton Plains: Part of the Peak Wilderness. See Lonely Planet guide for access and accommodation.

Uda Walawe: is currently the only National Park that is open. Apparently you need a jeep to visit this from accommodation in Embilipitiya. There a just to the north of Uda Walawe reckoned to be good for raptors.

Tangamalai Sanctuary: is a mile or two after Haputale on the road to Nuwara Eliya. Look for a big mansion called Adisham on the left of the road. There is a path to the left just before the mansion that leads into the sanctuary.

2003 Postscript

The above trip report was written at a time when there was relatively little literature available for birdwatchers visiting Sri Lanka. While being recognised as one of the better examples of its genre at the time, a good modern report would now be expected to include much more detail on the logistics and birds at each site and include detailed maps. Much has changed in the intervening period. Anyone planning a visit should not rely on any of the logistical details given in the above, but refer to more recent reports. A good source of information is the Internet, where many trip reports are posted on websites. Using a search engine such as Google, one can find a number of such reports. Trip reports by Brian Gee are exemplary. These and others are available from the Oriental Bird Club http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/sales/tripreports.html.

Nowadays, it is perfectly possible to plan a visit such that one can see practically all of the Sri Lankan endemic species in 12-14 days, especially if one uses the services of one of a number of excellent local birdwatching guides. Although Mr Hoffman has since retired, Baur's is still a very good local agent, and the very best local guides can be booked through them: website www.baurs.com; email tourism@baurs.com.

The number of endemic species in Sri Lanka is a matter of some debate. It has certainly increased by at least one with the astonishing recent discovery by Deepal Warakagoda, Sri Lanka's leading field ornithologist, of a new species of owl—the Sri Lanka Scops Owl. Including this, local ornithologists currently recognise 27 endemics, having elevated some endemic subspecies to full species status. However, this taxonomic restructuring, although possibly merited, has not always been backed up by fully researched and published papers.

Materials for field identification have also improved considerably. Primary field guide reference is now: John Harrison, illustrated by Tim Worfolk: *A Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*. 1999, O.U.P.

Also consider as supplements:

Krys Kazmierczak, illustrated by Ber van Perlo: *A Field Guide to the Birds of India, Sri Lanka etc.* 2000, Pica Press/Om Book Service.

Richard Grimmett; Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp: *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1999, Christopher Helm/A. & C. Black. A useful little book with photographs, though not a stand-alone field guide, is

Wijeyeratne, Gehan De Silva; Warakagoda, Deepal & De Zylva, T.S.U.: *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*. 2000, New Holland.

Deepal Warakagoda has recorded and compiled *The BIRD SOUNDS of Sri Lanka,* an audio CD of 99 Sri Lankan bird species, which can be used for study or identification. It is available from Eco Rhythm, 5A

Perahera Mawatha, Colombo 2, Sri Lanka. Phone Colombo 2439883.

Another useful source of information is the monthly e-mailed newsletter *SRI LANKA WILDLIFE NEWS*. To receive a copy, e-mail gehan@jetwing.lk with "Subscribe Wildlife News" in the subject header.

Red-faced Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*

Ceylon Blue Magpie *Urocissa ornata*

Spot-winged Thrush *Zoothera spiloptera*

A COMPARISON OF THE BREEDING BEHAVIOUR OF TWO SPECIES OF SUNBIRDS (NECTARINIIDAE)[1]

H. DANIEL WESLEY
126, Ramalinga Nagar, Tiruchirappalli 620017, Tamil Nadu.

Two species of sunbirds (Nectariniidae), Loten's Sunbird *Nectarinia lotenia* (Linnaeus, 1766) and Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* (Linnaeus, 1766), frequent the vegetation around my residence in Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu. An account on the clutch, incubation and nestling periods have been reported for the purple-rumped sunbird (Wesley, 1996). The overall brood length and inter-brood time gap had not been presented earlier. The present account attempts to compare the information available for *Nectarinia zeylonica* with that which is obtained for *Nectarinia lotenia*.

Four broods, two each of two purple-rumped sunbird pairs, were observed in detail from nest construction to fledging of the young (Table 1). The period from the first day of actual nest building to the day of fledging of the young is designated as the Eco-brood length (Ebl); that from the initiation of the clutch to the fledging of the young as Innate brood length (Ibl). This distinction is made to accommodate the possible delay in the nest construction due to ecological/environmental factors. The inter-brood time gap between broods spanning from the fledging of one and starting of the nesting of the succeeding brood is termed as Reproductive refractory period (Rrp). Only two broods of two pairs of the Loten's sunbirds, separated by a long gap of eight years, could be observed in detail (Table 2).

Observations

Purple-rumped Sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica*

Pair 1A: At 1.30pm on 5 November 1990 a male purple-rumped sunbird inspected repeatedly a terminal part of a slender twig of a fence *Prosopis* sp., overhanging the water. A male Loten's sunbird was tolerated close by though not welcome, for he was followed and seen off silently 6m away from the nest site. Construction of the nest began on 9 November, but it was not occupied; though finished. Another nest was begun about 6m away on 19 November and completed on 24 November. This turn of events may have been because of my shaking the nest twig violently from the dry side of the fence at 7 p.m. on 13 November to check the

[1] *Received for publication*: 13 October 2001.

presence or absence of the bird, as it was not possible to reach the nest by wading in the water. A clutch of the two eggs laid consecutively was started on 27 November. They hatched on 13 December and fledged on the 28 November.

Pair 1B: The adults had been around thereabout and on 20 January 1991, the male verified the worth of a prosopis twig's end portion 2.5m from the previous nest. Construction was started on 22 January and completed on 31 January. Two eggs, one each day, were laid on 4 and 5 February. The young hatched on 19 and 20 February and fledged on 6 March 1991.

Pair 2A: A pair of purple-rumped sunbirds had been in the prosopis fence by my window since 10 September 1992, the male performing acrobatics at the terminal end of a twig, followed by his mate. The female started the nest construction on 14 September. The globular nest, completed on 20 September, remained vacant for two nights. The two-egg clutch initiated on 22 September was completed on 23 September. On 7 October, 15th day, both the eggs hatched. The young fledged on 23 October.

Pair 2B: At 7.35 am on 8 December 1992 a pair of sunbirds called alarm at a male Loten's sunbird in full breeding plumage, as they would at a predator, followed him till he departed from their territory. The same call was repeated *ad nauseum* at 1.35pm on 9 December at a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) that was shaking and preening after dips in the water. The intruder gone, the pair checked a few twigs before selecting one for the nest about 3m., from the earlier one. Materials were collected afresh and not snatched from the abandoned ones in the fence. Nest construction began on 10 December and was completed by 20 December. Two eggs were laid one each day, on 22 and 23 December. The young hatched out on 6 January, and fledged on 22 January.

Loten's Sunbird ***Nectarinia lotenia***

Pair 1: A male Loten's sunbird, in full breeding plumage, was in a low prosopis bush with a twig overhanging a low-lying, inundated and squelchy area, on 15 January 1984. On 18 January a female was observed starting a nest on the twig where spider webs were stretching between it and surrounding vegetation. The nest was finished on 23 January with the laying of white pappus of *Calotropis gigantea*. Two eggs were laid, the clutch initiated on 26 January. Both eggs hatched on 11 February, and the young fledged on 26 February. By this time the nest was enmeshed in a welter of spider's silken threads criss-crossing high and low.

Pair 2: At 5p.m., on 7 November 1991 a male in complete breeding attire was in the Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) in front of my house. The female, rarely seen, was observed on the next day among the *Ipomea* sp. Visiting or not visiting flowers, they shifted positions within a radius of about 150m from the spot that was to become the nest-site, occasionally accosting a male purple-rumped sunbird. Their calls changed in kind, tone and pitch as to the situation, before being muffled during incubation and brooding. The nest, started on 30 November, was hung among spider webs from a barbwire fence in an inundated, muddy area that was once a paddy field, and about 100m from that of 1984. On 5 December the female feathered the nest with pappus hairs of the milkweed, making at least three trips in 50 seconds. Construction over, the nest remained vacant for a couple of days, the clutch being initiated on 8 December and completed on 9 December.

Incubation ended on 24 December. When the nest was checked, the male flew to a *Delonix regia*, 30m away and the female came and alighted rather silently and inquiringly a few meters away on the fence wire. The young fledged on 8 January 1992.

A Comparison of data

Eco-brood length [Ebl] of *Nectarinia zeylonica* was 41 (±2.30), the individual values being 39 and 43 days. As for *Nectarinia lotenia* it was 39 days, individual values of both broods being identical.

The mean Innate brood length (Ibl) for *Nectarinia zeylonica* was 30.75 (±0.5), the minimum being 30 and the maximum 31 days; that for *Nectarinia lotenia* was 31, both the broods giving similar values.

The Reproductive refractory period (Rrp) showed a mean for *Nectarinia zeylonica* of 36.5 (±16.6), the minimum and maximum being 25 and 48 days. This is not known for *Nectarinia lotenia* as the two instances were not of the same pair, much far apart in time.

Conclusion

The purple-rumped sunbird builds nests, anew for every other brood. For the Loten's sunbird this is not even guessable.

With small number of broods examined of either species, it is hard to arrive at any solid conclusion. However, a general inference may be made that would be appreciative of the basic pattern of behavior of the sibling species being similar. In the Loten's sunbird the Ibl seems constant at 31 days, while in the purple-rumped sunbird there is a difference of a day, which should prove insignificant also at the population level.

Similar situation seems to prevail in the two species with reference to Ebl, the purple-rumped sunbird showing variation by four

presence or absence of the bird, as it was not possible to reach the nest by wading in the water. A clutch of the two eggs laid consecutively was started on 27 November. They hatched on 13 December and fledged on the 28 November.

Pair 1B: The adults had been around thereabout and on 20 January 1991, the male verified the worth of a prosopis twig's end portion 2.5m from the previous nest. Construction was started on 22 January and completed on 31 January. Two eggs, one each day, were laid on 4 and 5 February. The young hatched on 19 and 20 February and fledged on 6 March 1991.

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Similar situation seems to prevail in the two species with reference to Ebl, the purple-rumped sunbird showing variation by four

days. This may be thought of as being due to the bird being sensitive to even slight disturbances in the territory during the nest-building phase. But in view of the fact that the second brood in either pair having registered the same umber of days, it might be indicative of the variability that is inherently possible in the genome. The variations noticed were in the duration of hatching and fledging periods. Seemingly, these are alterable, within limits of course, by the incubating bird and the environmental vicissitudes respectively.

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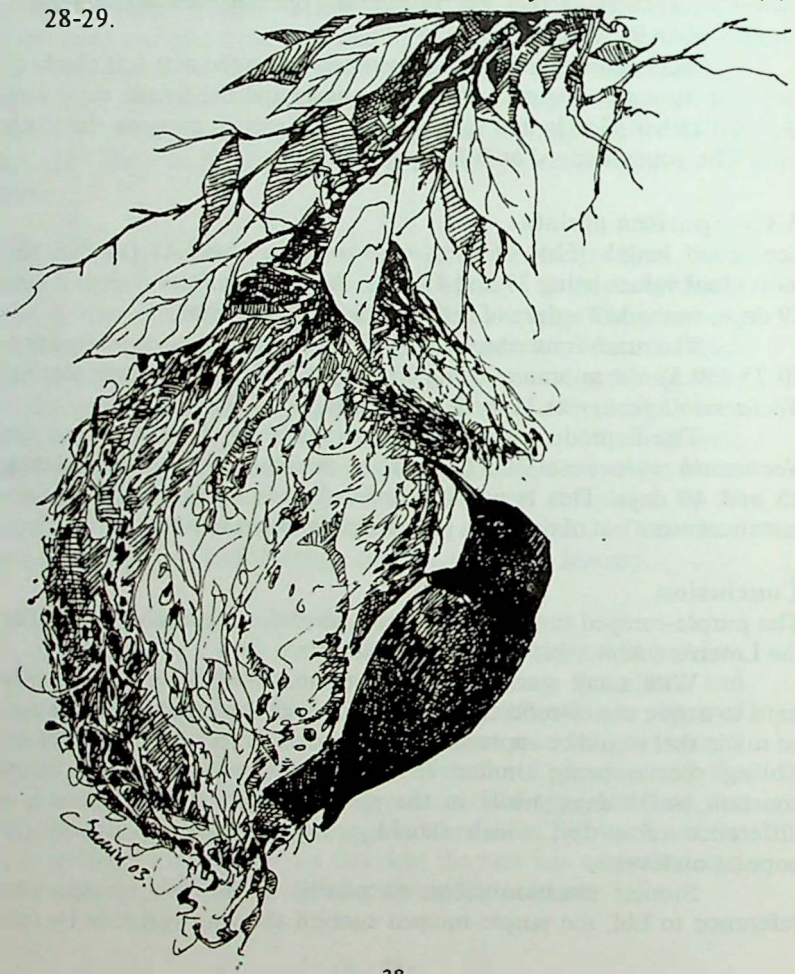

Table 1

Quotidian details of nidification: *Nectarinia zeylonica* [Pair 1 (A & B); Pair 2 (A & B)].

Brood	Days of						Days
No.	Nest: Initiation / Completion	Clutch: Initiation / Completion	Hatching / Incubation Period	Fledging / Nestling Period	Ebl	Ibl	Rrp
Pair 1A	19-xi-1990 24-xi	27-xi 28-xi	13-xii [15 days]	28-xii [15 days]	39	31	25
Pair 1B	22-i-1991 31-i	4-ii 5-ii	19-ii 20-ii [15 days]	6-iii [14 days]	43	30	
Pair 2A	14-ix-1992 20-ix	22-ix 23-ix	7-x [14 days]	23-x [16 days]	39	31	48
Pair 2B	10-xii 20-xii	22-xii 23-xii	6-i-1993 [14 days]	22-i [16 days]	43	31	

Table 2
Quotidian details of nidification: *Nectarinia lotenia* [Pair 1; Pair 2].

Brood	Days of						Days
No.	Nest: Initiation / Completion	Clutch: Initiation / Completion	Hatching / Incubation Period	Fledging / Nestling Period	Ebl	Ibl	Rrp
Pair 1	18-i-1984 23-i	26-i 27-i	11-ii [15 days]	26-ii [15 days]	39	31	—
Pair 2	30-xi-1991 5-xii	8-xii 9-xii	24-xii [15 days]	8-i-1992 [15 days]	39	31	—

MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

Scavenging behaviour of White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (Pennant, 1769)[1]

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During the second half of April 2001, I was residing in a quiet village in Kollam district of Kerala. The house had four acres full of fruiting trees like Mango *Mangifera indica*, Jackfruit *Artocarpus heterophylus*, Wild Jack *Artocarpus hirsutus*, Rose Apple *Syzygium jambos* and so on. A small stream divided the property into two and adjacent to it were paddies. From their early morning calls I realized there were plenty of White-breasted Waterhens *Amaurornis phoenicurus* (Pennant, 1769) in the paddies and around the *nala*. Two or three pairs visited the Banana (*Musa* sp.) plantations near the house, from 6.30a.m. throughout the day, where the kitchen waste and leftovers were dumped. Juveniles with a faint or no red base to their bills were also seen with adult birds. They seemed to have taken over the duties from crows (Corvidae) and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766), the usual household scavengers. The mynas and crows did not visit this dump, but instead fed on the yellow fruits of the wild jackfruit and mango.

'Free-falling' behaviour of Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus* (Linnaeus, 1758)[2]

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Orioles (Oriolidae) are one group of birds of which very little detailed study has been made, partly because they are shy and difficult to observe (Blake, 1964). I had the opportunity to closely observe the activities of Black-headed Orioles *Oriolus xanthornus*

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[2] *Received for publication*: 25 August 2001.

(Linnaeus, 1758), in Mangad village, Kollam district, Kerala, on a full-time basis during the last two weeks of April 2001. They were feeding on the fruits of extremely tall trees (*c.*25-30m), the Wild Jack *Artocarpus hirsutus* laden with ripe fruits in the compound of the house. A large number of birds were seen on these trees, of which, Small Green Barbet *Megalaima viridis*, Black-headed Oriole, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* and Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* were the principal feeders.

I observed the orioles free falling, (dives or plunges with almost closed wings) from the canopy of the Wild Jack after feeding, but just before touching the ground, barely centimeters above, they would rise at about an angle of 45° and perch on other vegetation at a height of one to two metres and rest. I had initially assumed these were the falling ripe leaves of the Jackfruit, which were similar in colour to the birds, till I noticed the birds rising and perching. After checking literature I found that this behaviour was not recorded for orioles and is hence worth mentioning. It may be a part of courtship display. Their breeding period is reported to be from March to July (Ali & Ripley, 1972). Similar behaviour is reported in birds of prey, belonging to genera such as *Accipiter, Circus, Buteo, Pernis, Circaetus, Aquila* and *Falco* (Brown & Amadon, 1968), and also in Rollers (Coraciidae) (Fry et al. 1988), as part of their territorial and courtship displays.

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Editors: *Mayura*.

Our Logo: Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura*

The word PITTA has come into Ornithology from the Telugu *pitta*, [small bird, (in the native tongue of the people of Andhra Pradesh state, India)], latinized by Vieillot in 1816, as the name of a Genus, and since adopted by ornithologists as the English name for a group of birds, remarkable for their great beauty. In Ornithology, the word is first found as part of the native name *ponnunky pitta* given in 1713 by Petiver, in the "mantissa" to John Ray's SYNOPSIS, on the authority of one Edward Buckley of Fort St. George, Madras city. This bird is the *P*[*itta*]. *Bengalensis* Vieillot 1922 [= *Pitta brachyura* (Linnaeus, 1766)] of modern ornithologists.